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CO-OPERATION OF DEPARTMENTS TO SECURE GOOD SPEECH AND WRITING¹

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By departments, I assume, we mean the high-school classes in science, mathematics, languages—especially translation—history, commerce; and grade-school classes in geography, arithmetic, music, drawing, etc. The problem proposed is to secure good speech and writing through the instrumentalities used in teaching the subjects named. Can we enlist the sympathetic interest of those teachers whose fundamental business is conceived to be not English, but physics, geometry, ancient history, or the Orations of Cicero? Can we persuade these teachers that it is part of their duty, as well as a distinct privilege, to make a conscious effort to secure good speaking and writing from their pupils? Can we show how the daily lesson in any or all of these subjects may contribute to the building of a habit, namely, the habitual use of good English? Does the daily work in such a subject as physics offer suitable material for instruction in English? And, assuming that you will answer all these questions affirmatively, are our teachers qualified to give the co-operation we seek?

We may take up the problem in the following order: (1) the qualifications of the non-English department teachers to teach English; (2) reasons why these teachers should co-operate with the English teachers; (3) ways and means of co-operation.

¹ A paper read before the New York State Association of Teachers of English, Syracuse, N.Y., November 25, 1913.

1. QUALIFICATIONS OF TEACHERS

We shall probably find in the department teacher the greatest obstacle to the results we seek. Most of our teachers of science, of mathematics, of history, and of foreign languages are products of elective courses in college. In many cases their elections included no work in English; the few who elected English in college limited themselves to an unseemly minimum. Add to this defective training the fact that the teaching body is recruited from homes where purity and elegance of speech receive no more attention than, perhaps not as much as, fashion in dress or the latest steps in the dance, and we readily understand why teachers often are unable to guide their pupils in the direction of good speech and writing. Their own speech habits are too close to the language level of the street.

Unfortunately we too often forget that speech is a habit before it becomes a matter of technique. I wish it might never become a matter of technique. The department teachers of whom we speak think of teaching English in the same way as they think of explaining a mathematical formula, a piece of scientific apparatus, or a chemical symbol. They think only experts can use the machine or derive the formula. So, in a truly scientific attitude, many teachers will not venture into a field of supposedly technical material with which they are not familiar. The science teacher may be uncertain whether his pupil is using description or exposition in reciting about the air pump; he may be uncertain about paragraph divisions and transitions, may never have heard of these matters and so, in avoiding English teaching as a technical matter, he also fails to fix his pupils' habits of speech. He neglects the nice distinctions between words and the ordinary demands of diction. He asks so many questions and expects such piecemeal answers that his pupil cannot form any habit of fluency or learn how to organize the material of an answer which should cover one or more short paragraphs.

2. REASONS FOR CO-OPERATION

The department teacher might take a leaf from Stevenson's *Lay Morals* where he speaks as follows:

The problem of education is twofold: first to know and then to utter. Everyone who lives any semblance of an inner life thinks more nobly and profoundly than he speaks; and the best teachers can impart only broken images of the truth which they perceive. Speech which goes from one to another between two natures, and, what is worse, between two experiences, is doubly relative. The speaker buries his meaning; it is for the hearer to dig it up again; and all speech, written or spoken, is in a dead language until it finds a willing and prepared hearer.

Applied to the intercommunications of the recitation, this truth has great significance.

The English language is a tool of constant use in every recitation with which pupil and teacher seek to "dig up again" the meanings buried by the speaker. The teacher cannot make his thoughts known to his pupils without this tool; the pupils cannot communicate their ideas to teachers of other pupils without it. English, spoken or written, is therefore an indispensable part of each recitation; is *the* recitation. The success of the recitation depends wholly upon the skill with which teacher and pupils can use this tool. So completely do correctness and clearness of expression dominate the recitation results, that we may confidently say to the department teacher that English should be his first concern. Failures of pupils most frequently are due to their inability to understand the language of the teacher or of the textbook. Probably half of the poor teacher's questions are framed in an effort to get the pupil to understand. The textbook has to be supplemented in various ways to bring its language within the comprehension of the pupil. As it is the first duty of a good workman to have his tool in good condition, so it is the duty of a good teacher to have English, the recitation tool, in easy and fluent operation.

I assume that the department teacher will readily assent to the truth of all this. He may, if he is self-satisfied, reply that slang is more effective than more elegant speech; that single word or phrase replies may be clear, complete, and to the point; that the pupil's knowledge of the subject may be discovered in *choppy*, hesitating answers, provoked by prodding questions, as well as in fluent, well-arranged answers of greater length; that some pupils know the lesson but cannot express themselves; that the context will usually show the meaning and so make the use of "lie" for

"lay," "bring" for "fetch," "in" for "into," and so on, acceptable to him as recitation speech. On such a recalcitrant teacher, and you will find many such, we must bring to bear the example of the perfect workman. The sharp tool is surely superior to the dull. It not only lightens the labor but increases the beauty and perfection of the product. Good speech, correct speech, fluent speech not only quickens the recitation, but it enhances the fitness of the pupil for the business of intercourse with his kind. As speech is the universal and indispensable tool of the classroom, so is it likewise the touchstone to success in life. It therefore becomes the sacred duty of the teacher to equip his pupils with the best and readiest speech of which each individual is capable. A department teacher who will not accept this duty is surely a misfit and should work in baser material than children's minds.

Most teachers will of course concede the importance of English to their work. The utilitarian argument of the last paragraph need be used only with the baser sort. But it still remains to show how the recitation may be used to cultivate habits of good speech. Teachers may assent to all the points we can make about the value of good speaking and writing and may yet fail to see how they can assist us in securing these desirable ends.

3. WAYS AND MEANS OF CO-OPERATION

In discussing ways and means of co-operation we must of course distinguish between oral and written recitations. I hold that the oral recitation is vastly more important in that it offers greater opportunity. In the first place, oral speech is the natural means of communication in all the intercourse of home, school, play-field, business, and social circle. Writing is largely conventional. Speech is, furthermore, instantaneous. By it teacher and pupil, or pupil and pupil, stand soul to soul. Any inadequacy of oral speech becomes apparent at once; accuracy, elegance, eloquence have immediate effect. Here, then, is the great opportunity for the teacher. By constant watchfulness he can keep the recitation tool sharp and can force home upon the child the extreme desirability of a mastery of English.

In the oral recitation four things can be taught to advantage: (1) accurate use of words; (2) absolute co-ordination between answer and question; (3) fluency and completeness of statement; (4) logical arrangement of thought.

It will aid our discussion to reproduce here some typical recitations of high-school classes. A stenographic report was made of recitations in ancient history, American history, plane geometry, physics, and third-year English. The pupils did not know that their words were being recorded, nor did the teachers know that their own work was about to be placed under the microscope. What I am about to present is therefore an approximately faithful record of what occurs hourly in every high-school class, and I believe it is almost wholly free from any studied effects. I want to call your attention in advance to the fact that there are few gross grammatical errors in the record. The language of these high-school pupils is fairly correct. I think it will appear that it is not forceful, not clear, not fluent, not logical, therefore not effective. It will be necessary to observe the language used by the teacher. Not infrequently it lacks precision and sometimes correctness.

A recitation in ancient history on "Greek Colonization" ran thus:

T. Will you explain how political unrest contributed to the colonization of the Greeks?

P. They were generally very cruel to the people they conquered and the people would be dissatisfied with the government and would go to some place where they could make their own laws and form colonies. [Note the failure to seize upon "political unrest" as the key.]

T. Another cause?

P. Some people didn't like the aristocratic form of government.

T. Yes. For what other reason did they leave Greece?

P. Greece was a very small country and had a large population.

T. Can you explain that a little?

P. The country wasn't large enough for all the people and they had to go to some other. Greece was very mountainous and there wasn't—the people wouldn't have enough land. They couldn't all till the soil; the soil wasn't fertile and the population was so large they had to find some other place.

P. No. 2. The people came from the north and they pushed the others out.

P. No. 3. The people generally lived in cities and it was very rare that they left, and when the city was overcrowded, they would go in groups and found another city.

T. Yes, that was true. Why was it they collected in towns?

P. Because at home they were in towns that were separated and were not united. [Note the vagueness of "at home"; the lack of precision.]

T. I don't understand what you mean.

P. Well, like Athens and Sparta. They formed different cities with different governments, and it was the same race of people in the cities but it was different ancestry.

T. But that doesn't quite explain why the people lived in cities. Why do you think they did?

P. Because they could have a government of their own. [Note the irrelevance of the reply.]

Throughout this recitation there is a lack of co-ordination between question and answer, a failure to use words accurately, incompleteness of statement, and in some cases incoherence of ideas. Observe the teacher's questions: "Another cause"; "Can you explain that a little"; "I don't understand what you mean"; "But that doesn't explain why the people lived in cities." Is it not clear that this recitation was laboring with very imperfect tools of language? The pupil had not understood the language of the book, failed to grasp the full meaning of the questions, and failed to match his answers to the questions. And note especially the lack of fluency and completeness of statement.

This recitation is from a first-year class in ancient history. The subject is difficult, doubly so because of the foreign names. The children have not yet learned sufficient Latin to penetrate the language of the textbook easily. Then, too, the children of the first year are necessarily immature. But that you may not too easily excuse these shortcomings, I give below a recitation from fourth-year American history. Notice the many questions from the teacher. How often the speech of the pupils halts until a new question starts the current anew! Even here among high-school Seniors there is failure to comprehend the question; failure to know words accurately.

AMERICAN HISTORY—EARLY VIRGINIA

T. How do you account for the terrible suffering in early Virginia?

P. I believe that there had been no one else there before and they met with the hostility of the Indians. They had no means by which they could make their living. They didn't know of any, but they finally got on very well.

T. What other reason besides the hostility?

P. I think the reason was because the people didn't want to work.

T. What other reason?

P. The place where they settled. They picked out the low land instead of the high land.

T. Do you know whether there is any settlement on the site of Jamestown at the present time?

P. I don't know.

T. (*To another pupil*) Do you know about it?

P. Nothing but an old broken tower.

T. What were their reasons for coming to America?

P. I think they came over without the right intention. They came over to get rich instead of settling down and making a living, and when they found they couldn't get rich they had to settle.

T. Were there any other reasons for the suffering?

P. They were bound by very strict laws. For instance, the common storehouse. The people that came over to Massachusetts weren't bound by such laws.

T. Any other reason?

P. The people who came weren't the thrifty people of England; that is, most of them. They were for the greater part made up of the criminals that had their choice between hanging and coming to Virginia, some gentlemen, and the few thrifty ones who did come lost their energy and ambition when they got here, there were so many thriftless ones. No one seemed to want to work.

T. Anything else?

P. It wasn't the criminals who came over to early Virginia. I understood it was the cavaliers and fortune seekers.

T. Tell us the account of the beginning of the colony as given by Mr. Eggleston.

P. They came in 1607 in two small boats and they were mostly gentlemen and a few laborers. They went by a very long route and went down around the Canary Islands and that took them a long while to get to America. When they arrived it was past seed time, so they didn't get anything planted and their supplies gave out and the famine started.

T. What does he tell about the Indians at the beginning?

P. The first Indians that they saw were very cruel and after that it was necessary for one man to watch all night, but there was one chief who was very kind to them.

T. Tell us what Mr. Eggleston says in regard to John Smith's place in early Virginia.

P. John Smith came over with a company and he was elected governor, and he was very friendly with the Indians and he was—his life was saved by Pocahontas, the daughter of an Indian chief. He saved the colony from

starvation. Afterwards some people there didn't like him and they had him sent back to England.

T. What other service did he render more important to later people than to those who lived there in his own time?

P. Why, he went up and down the James River and drew charts of the shores and later he went up along the coast and visited settlements or visited places where later settlements were made.

T. Will you discuss the veracity of John Smith as discussed by Mr. Eggleston?

P. In his early life it tells of where he had done very many deeds of great chivalry. It tells how he cut off a pirate's head every day for the amusement of the ladies, and how he got a castle full of treasure. He done very many chivalry deeds and he thought that England wasn't wide enough for him so he came over to America and landed in Virginia.

T. What about his veracity? That is what I asked you about.

P. I don't know.

T. (To another pupil) When we talk about the veracity of a person, what do we mean?

P. The truthfulness of a person.

T. (To first pupil) Can you discuss Mr. Smith's veracity?

P. Why he did a great deal for his colony.

T. I don't believe you get the meaning of that word yet. Mr. —

P. He had a vivid imagination and every time he did anything we find that he made the story a great deal larger than it was.

The same difficulty arises in other recitations. I give below an example from a physics recitation.

PHYSICS

T. Note carefully what happens as the water rises. What change is taking place in the tube?

P. It goes faster than the mercury.

T. Well, yes.

P. It drives the air out.

T. It certainly does. Note how the difference in the height of the column shows the intensity of the pressure. But it shows more than that. What do we call a U-shaped tube with mercury in it, open at one end?

P. Pressure gauge or monometer.

T. How is the pressure shown by means of the monometer or pressure gauge?

P. The difference in the height of the column of mercury.

T. That is correct. There is greater difference now than when we started. What does it show?

P. The pressure is greater now than it was before.

T. Anyone else? The pressure is greater now than it was before. Why? Why is the pressure greater now than it was when the water was low in the tube?

P. There is more water in there.

P. No. 2. It weighs more.

T. The height is greater. It doesn't make any difference about how much water there is. The height is greater, you say. How else do we measure water along that same line? We speak of the height of the river, but we also speak of the ——.

P. Depth.

T. Now then, the water is deeper now than when there was very little in the tube. What does that show about the relation between depth and pressure?

P. The pressure varies directly with the depth.

T. Is that correct?

P. Yes.

T. That is the law that I tried to illustrate in setting up this apparatus. As we turn in the water it grows deeper and deeper and the pressure becomes greater and greater. Any question about it? You notice the water becomes less and less deep, does it not, and the pressure becomes less and less. What does this apparatus show? (*Teacher turns to another table.*)

P. When you press down on that, the pressure on the inside of the glass is equal in all directions.

T. That is right. The pressure is therefore equal in all directions without any change in intensity.

T. I have here a small pail and a cylinder which just fits inside of the pail. It is balanced by the weights on the other side of the scale pan. I will take out the cylinder and hang it on the bottom of the pail and then submerge the cylinder in water. Why do the two not balance now?

P. Because the cylinder when submerged in water loses weight.

T. What causes this?

P. It is caused by buoyancy.

T. It certainly loses weight, doesn't it? And that loss of weight is called buoyancy. What is the cause of this loss of weight?

P. Because the pressure on the cylinder isn't equal in all directions.

T. It isn't equal. Where is it greater?

P. At the bottom.

T. Why?

P. Because the water is deepest. The pressure varies directly according to the depth.

T. That is correct. How much weight has that cylinder lost?

P. The same amount as the amount of liquid it displaces.

T. How much does it displace?

P. Its own volume.

T. Certainly. Why does the cylinder displace its own volume?

P. Two bodies cannot occupy the same space at once.

In this recitation in physics, there was an especially fine opportunity to cultivate good speech. There was an experiment; the pupil made the observations, that is got ideas, and was then asked to express these ideas. The process should have been: observation, perception and apperception, organization of thought, and, finally, expression. As a matter of record, the teacher asked 22 questions; the answers thus provoked were expressed in sentences 9 times; in clauses 3 times; in phrases or single words 6 times. The teacher's questions cover 400 words; the pupil's answers 133 words. From the point of view of language, as well as physics, these observations should have been expressed in language by the pupils without more than one or two questions from the teacher; the recitation should have been fluent and completed in about 400 words. In reality, the teacher here recited for the pupils and thereby throttled whatever language stimuli the experiment had produced. The same criticism applies to the recitation in geometry, although there the pupil's answers were more specific and to the point.

I want to give one more example merely to show that English classes are not always above reproach. Here is a third-year recitation on *Julius Caesar*.

T. When Brutus in reply to Antony says,

"Though now we must appear bloody and cruel,
As by our hands and this our present act,"

what does he mean?

P. That they were grieved in killing Caesar.

T. No, he doesn't. What does he concede in that first clause I have just read?

P. That he can only see the hands and not the thoughts.

T. The meaning is?

P. That they meant right.

T. Yes. Their thoughts and intentions are right.

"This bleeding busines they have done,"

he goes on to say.

"Our hearts you see not; they are pitiful."

What does he mean by that?

P. Sorry they killed Caesar.

P. No. 2. They did it for the good of their country.

T. In closing his remarks, he says,

“To you our swords have leaden points,”

meaning what?

P. Why, to you they will never point the ends of their swords.

T. Then he says,

“Our arms in strength of malice, and our hearts
of brothers’ temper receive you in.”

What is the meaning of “Our arms in strength of malice do receive you in”?

P. It means welcome.

T. Yes, but in strength of malice. What does malice mean?

P. Hatred.

T. Yes, evil will. And the arms were receiving them in strength of malice. It means that their arms were engaged in committing a deed which showed hatred, but their hearts had brothers’ temper, meaning that their attitude is what?

P. Friendly.

T. Yes. Cassius has a different kind of word to say to Antony. What is the difference between Brutus’ remarks to Antony and those of Cassius?

P. Why, Cassius said that Mark Antony would have as large an office in the country as any of them would have. He thought Antony would fall for that because he thought he wanted power.

T. Look out for slang. Brutus goes on to say, “Be patient,” until what happens? “We will explain” after what?

P. After they have satisfied the people.

T. Yes. Why? Why wouldn’t they satisfy Antony first?

P. Why, because he was a particular friend of Caesar’s.

T. That would seem to make it necessary to explain to Antony before they did to the common people.

P. Because possibly they thought that the people were more important than just one man.

T. Anything else to add?

P. Perhaps because they thought that the people wouldn’t wait.

T. That is it. Then in the speech of Antony, he first does what?

P. Why, he says he doesn’t doubt that their intentions are good, and he gives each man his hand.

T. Why does he carefully show his respect for each one of these men and close by saying,

“Good Trebonius, though last, not least in love”?

P. He says he shakes with him last, but not because he likes the other ones better than him.

T. Why does he seem so friendly in his attitude?

P. Why, he wants to gain their good will and make the people think he doesn’t feel bad.

T. No. He wants them to know that he feels bad, but that he is friendly. He is trying hard not to let them know that he is deceiving them. In his remarks immediately after the handshaking, he expresses the difficult predicament he is in. What is this predicament?

P. Why, he loved Caesar, but he didn't want to talk too much about it.

T. There are two bad ways lying before him. One is that he is unfriendly to Caesar if he is friendly to them. What is the other way?

P. To not defend him and go in with them.

T. But he doesn't state that. He says, "My credit stands on such slippery ground, that there are two ways by which you can understand what I am doing."

P. He will be either a coward or a flatterer.

Can we imagine a recitation on this subject before the master himself, the founder of the Socratic Method? After reading this fine passage I can hear Socrates say:

Socrates: And now my good Timaeus, hath Brutus kept pure his heart while his hand wrought the bloody deed?"

Timaeus: He hath indeed. Brutus is pitiful. His heart bleeds for the general wrong of Rome. His pity for the oppressed and down-trodden outruns his pity for Caesar. His arms were strong in malice toward the selfish oppressor, but his heart is full of brothers' temper, full of all kind love, good thoughts, and reverence toward Antony.

Socrates: And Cassius?

Timaeus: Nay. Ignoble he. No pity, no friendship deep and true in Cassius. He thinks of spoils and dignities and their division. Herein doth lie the contrast. Brutus the heroic avenger of general wrong; Cassius the selfish seeker of spoils.

The Socratic Method is easily abused. When it fails to draw out the pupil, fails to induce speech, it is barren and often injurious. Skilful questioning is an art. If properly done, it will open the sluice-way of speech, where it may flow forth in unrestrained volume. From the recitations given above, it must be clear to us all that the teacher may be a hindrance to fluency and may mar the coherence of thought. He often accepts inaccuracies and often permits the pupil to use staccato English when he could secure far better results by insisting upon complete statements, couched in well-chosen words.

The oral recitation, then, is the place for crisp dialogue. Poor work by the pupil is quite as much due to careless use of language, as lack of knowledge on the subject-matter. Clear ideas and clear

language go hand in hand. No teacher can secure satisfactory results in any subject without careful insistence upon the language employed.

Written recitations offer an easier means of co-operation with the English department, but I believe far less effective. It is a simple matter, for example, to have the English teacher use a written lesson in any of the subjects of the high-school course in place of an assigned theme. Many science recitations, especially in biology, physical geography, and physics, will serve as exercises in description. History offers many examples of characterization and narration. Mechanics will serve for practice in exposition. Geometry is the standard example of deductive reasoning. History, again, affords drill in various forms of argument. Close co-operation will therefore make it possible to use papers from the various departments as specific assignments in composition. But still better will it be to have the English teacher review the papers in other subjects and grade them for English, no matter what form of discourse they may illustrate. Such co-operation will have a tendency to improve the mechanics of language—punctuation, capitalization, spelling, syllabication, paragraphing, diction. But it will be far more effective to have each department teacher do this work. The English teacher is likely to be a *deus ex machina* whose periodic appearance will be tolerated and forgotten. But if the departmental teacher declines to accept a statement as correct, whenever it is clothed in incorrect English, it focuses attention upon the value of the English language as a means of communication, and will soon lead to a conscious effort to use words precisely; to use sentences that are complete, paragraphs that are coherent; and to give answers that have essential connection with the questions propounded by the teacher.

Permit me to summarize the matters of co-operation in order that the discussion may become decisive.

1. The department teacher's interest must be secured by showing him that correct, forceful English will promote the progress of the pupils in his department.

2. Department teachers must have some knowledge of the technique of English teaching.

3. The oral recitation should be made a sharp and spirited practice in dialectic, giving the pupil keen appreciation of the power of retort, word values, speech effectiveness in general.

4. The department teacher should be trained to look for fluent, organized speech by the pupil. He should never himself get in the way of the pupil's speech by garrulous remarks of his own; nor should he form the bad habit of resting the speed of the recitation upon a multiplicity of his own questions.

5. The department teacher should of course accept only correct speech, complete sentences, coherent statements.

6. Written papers should be submitted at regular intervals to the English teachers for criticism from the English teachers' standpoint.

7. But the department teacher should himself demand good English in written work, just as he does in oral work.

8. The English teacher should use various departments for specific composition assignments, suiting the composition form to the department subject.

9. And, finally, the teachers of all departments should be assembled at intervals for the distinctive purpose of laying before them the supreme value of English. Such emphasis upon English is not only justified, it is indispensable. For English is the common medium of communication and facility of communication speeds up the education process.